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RAPIDO RIVER CROSSING

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defended German Gustav Line overlooking the Rapido River from the north. After two assaults, the 34th Division was repulsed with extremely high casualties. The attempted crossing was one of the most bitter failures of the Allied forces during World War II, and it became the subject of a Congressional inquiry. This action clearly illustrates the immense difficulties of crossing a riverline which is integrated into the enemy's main line of defense.

RAPIDO RIVER CROSSING

OFFENSIVE, DELIBERATE ATTACK, RIVER CROSSING

OPPOSING FORCES:

US: 36TH INFANTRY DIVISION, II CORPS, US 5TH ARMY

GERMAN: 15TH PANZER GRENADIER DIVISION, 19TH GERMAN ARMY

JANUARY 1944

PREPARED BY: STAFF GROUP 22A

MAJ MATTHIAS KNORR, AR

MAJ ROBERT A. BARLOW, USAF
MAJ ROBERT K. BILLINGS, AD
MAJ JAMES R. BURDICK, MP
LTC SALVATORE CARRARA, Italy
MAJ MELVIN L. HERITAGE, MI
CPT BILL T. HUTCHESON, AR
MAJ GLENN D. LLOYD, EN

MAJ RICHARD H. MACKEY, IN
MAJ CHARLES W. MACPHERSON, FA
MAJ ALAN H. MAESTAS, IN
MAJ GEORGE W. MANGUM, TC
MAJ JOHN S. O'CONNOR, IN
MAJ CLIFFORD T. ROCK, AG
MAJ WENDY A. WADINGER, SC

Submitted to the Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for subcourse P651, Battle Analysis.

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ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Rapido River Crossing, January 1944

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, River Crossing

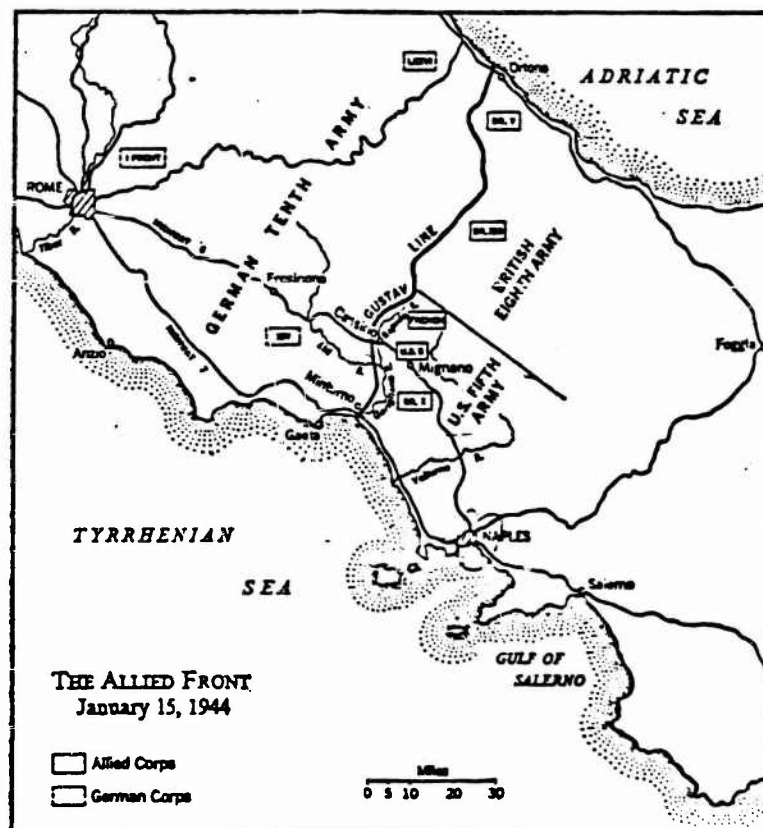
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5th Army

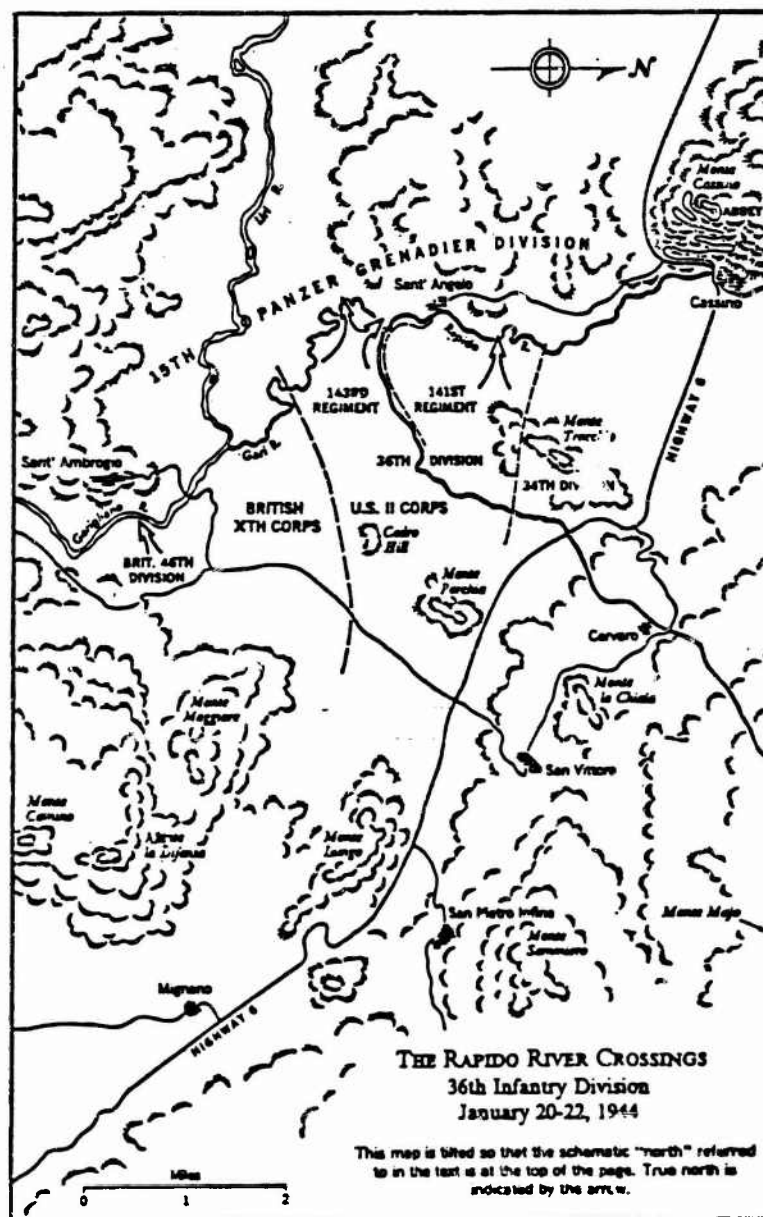
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German Army

SYNOPSIS: The crossing of the Rapido River in southern Italy and the assault on the German Gustav Line by General Mark Clark's 5th US Army was undertaken to prevent German forces from opposing VI Corps's amphibious landing at Anzio. Both operations, the river crossing and attack and the amphibious landing at Anzio, were part of an Allied campaign to push the Germans out of the Italian peninsula and to seize Rome. To assist the amphibious operations at Anzio, General Clark sent Major General Fred L. Walker's 36th "Texas" Division across the Rapido. The 36th Division attacked across the river with two regiments abreast. They struck head-on into the strongly defended German Gustav Line overlooking the Rapido River from the north. After two assaults, the 36th Division was repulsed with extremely heavy casualties. The attempted crossing was one of the most bitter failures of the Allied forces during World War II, and it became the subject of a Congressional inquiry. This action clearly illustrates the immense difficulties of crossing a riverline which is integrated into the enemy's main line of defense.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE BATTLE OF THE RAPIDO RIVER CROSSING

A. Date, Location and Principal Antagonists.

The battle of the Rapido River Crossing was fought 20-22 January 1944 in the Liri Valley of Italy, which is approximately seventy-five miles southeast of Rome. The nearest large city is Cassino. The US forces consisting of the 36th Infantry Division, II Corps, US 5th Army was given the mission of making an opposed, deliberate attack across the Rapido River and to subsequently secure an area near the village of St Angelo. The 36th Infantry Division was opposed by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, 19th German Army, which had prepared extensive and substantial defensive positions along the Rapido River. These German defenses were known as the Gustav Line, and clear direction had been provided by Hitler to the senior German commander, Kesselring, that the Gustav Line was to be held at all cost. The 36th Division's efforts to cross the Rapido River were successfully repulsed by the defenders at great cost to the 36th. This battle is frequently used as an example of how difficult an opposed, deliberate attack across a river can be.

B. Sources.

A complete listing of sources used to prepare this battle analysis are provided at the Bibliography. The sources of information included battle journals, after-action reports, unit histories, war diaries (both German and US), correspondence of the Commander of the 36th Infantry Division, and analyses by noted historians. Oral histories were both appropriate to and available for this analysis (see bibliographic entry under Government Documents for Casey, John W.).

C. Evaluation of Sources.

Several key sources proved useful to this battle analysis. The most notable of these were the two accounts of the Rapido River crossing written by Martin Blumenson. The first account, written under the auspices of the Office of the Chief of Military History, US Army, is part of the US Army in World War II series. The second work by Blumenson is his independently published work, Bloody River, The Real Tragedy of the Rapido. Both of Blumenson's works provided basically the same facts and details concerning the battle itself, though the latter work is more thorough. The key point of interest concerning these works, however, is that Blumenson reassessed the "root cause" of the Rapido River crossing failure in his latter work, finding significant fault with the 36th Infantry Division Commander, Major General Fred L. Walker.

Another key source of information for this analysis came from Major General Walker in the form of his Comments on the Rapido River Crossing, which he provided to the US Army Command and General Staff College in the fall of 1960. Gen Walker's comments are highly detailed and useful, but somewhat subjective. He attached several appendices to his comments which were also of use.

Another excellent source of information for this battle analysis was the Fifth Army History, Part IV, Cassino and Bozio, 16 January 1944 to 31 March 1944. This reference provided eighteen pages of detailed discussion of the Rapido River crossing, including materials required, materials available, and shortages encountered. The presentation of information is well organized, however the objectivity of the information presented required validation by other sources.

Casey

One such source, The Battle of Crossing by Fred Majdalany, is a useful source of information concerning the strategy which led to the decision to attempt the opposed river crossing. Included is a critical look at the intelligence information which caused the Allied military planners to believe the crossing could be successful, and a short, but useful chronology of the events which occurred at the Rapido River on 20-22 January 1944.

The oral history information provided by John W. Casey, a Field Artillery officer who interviewed available field artillery personnel involved in the Rapido River crossing immediately after the 36th Division's defeat, provides a vivid picture of the conditions faced by the soldiers and their leaders during the attempted crossings. The effectiveness and strength of the German defenses are clearly reflected in these oral histories.

Other sources consulted included almanacs and encyclopedias concerning major events in World War II. These sources refer to the 36th Infantry Division's efforts at the Rapido River, but only briefly. The other sources listed in the Bibliography were equally brief and were thus of limited value to the analysis.

II. THE STRATEGIC SETTING

To put the Rapido River Crossing operation into perspective, it is necessary to present a brief, general overview of the strategic setting (taken from Volume II of the West Point Atlas of American Wars).

In May 1943, General Eisenhower approved Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, with the following objectives: to secure the Mediterranean line of communication, to relieve pressure on the Russians by diverting German divisions, to eliminate Italy from the war, and to create "a situation in which Turkey could be enlisted as an active ally."

This limited operation was actually a compromise. The US wanted to secure all assets for an invasion of northern France (Operation Overlord), but the British wanted to exploit the successes in Northern Africa and keep the pressure on the Germans in the Mediterranean. In fact, had a cross channel operation been possible in 1943, Operation Husky would probably have been disapproved.

The Allies took Sicily in 1943, but two significant events followed that changed their previous strategy. Mussolini was ousted and Eisenhower was ordered by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to plan for landings at Salerno and a campaign against Italy. They decided that by threatening Germany's southern flank, Operation Overlord's chances of success would be enhanced.

The Allies had a far greater flexibility with command of the air and sea than did the Germans who were land-bound. Therefore, initial success with limited beachheads against light opposition characterized the landings at Salerno on 9 Sep 1943. However, the Germans allowed this to happen because they planned for a withdrawal northward if the Allies landed in Italy. Rommel, the commander of the German forces in Italy, could see no value in defending in the south. Instead, the Germans conducted a skillful, costly delay which inflicted maximum casualties on the Allies and traded precious time for every piece of terrain lost.

By October 1943 the Allies were no longer able to continue their offensive. Kesselring decided he was capable of defending south of Rome and was bound to make a fight of it. It was apparent to the Allies that they had lost the initiative and could no longer achieve a penetration to Rome. It must be emphasized that Rome was considered to be a very important political

and psychological objective. If captured, it would mean prestige for the Allies and if lost, disgrace for the Germans.

The Allies needed a decisive offensive operation to regain the initiative. General Alexander, commanding both the US 5th Army under Clark and the British 8th Army under Montgomery, decided that an amphibious operation at Anzio could cut off the German 10th Army defending to the south and require a diversion of reserve forces further weakening their defenses.

This then brings into focus the role of the 36th Division. On the 21st of January 1944, VI Corps under General Lucas conducted an amphibious operation to seize Anzio. The 36th Division, part of 5th Army, attempted an assault crossing of the Rapido River to link-up with VI Corps and continue the attack to Rome.

A comparison of the US and German armies, the major antagonists at the battle of the Rapido, indicates many similarities. Both armies were structured similarly with army, corps, and division sized elements. The US and German Infantry divisions were both made up of three regiments of three battalions each (Note: the German army went to a 2 battalion regiment in 1944 due to manpower shortages). Both armies in this battle understood the importance of using combined arms operations (tanks, infantry, artillery) as well as using air power. The Allies had a military advantage in fire power, protection of troops and mobility. The Germans had the advantages of better command and control systems, interior lines of communication and a strong defensive position--the Gustav Line. The Germans made good use of all their advantages, while many of the US advantages would be nullified by terrain, weather, and morale. The two nations had special operations units such as the

SS (German), Rangers (US), and elite airborne troops, as well as highly trained regulars. Both the American army and the German army met at the Rapido River with reasonably experienced, properly equipped and generally equal forces. The battle was not decided by new, special weapons or superior tactics, but to a large degree by the impact of intangibles which will be addressed later in this paper.

III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

A. Area of Operations.

(1) Climate and Weather

During 20-22 January 1944 the Rapido River area was not conducive to operations. There was about 11 hours of darkness (sunrise 0730, sunset 1700) which was accompanied by fog and an absence of moonlight. Daytime haze was attenuated by Allied and German smoke. Visibility was poor by day and even worse by night. Observed artillery fire support was almost impossible. Land navigation at night was an extreme challenge. In addition, it was wet and cold. Very heavy rains and melting mountain snow had caused the rivers to swell and move swiftly, overflowing their banks and flooding low lying areas, to include many portions of the few roads in the area. The remaining ground was a quagmire, 3-4 inches of mud for foot soldiers and 6-10 inches for vehicles which seriously degraded mobility. Water temperature was a few degrees above freezing. It was hard to stay dry and even harder to dry out once wet. River crossing operations were exceptionally difficult to conduct due to the swift current.

The effect of the weather was to make operations difficult, especially at night. The dreariness and discomfort to troops caused by the cold and wetness

adversely affected morale. The added hardships caused by the weather accelerated troop fatigue. The overall result was to seriously reduce troop effectiveness in combat.

(2) Terrain (OCOKA)

(a) Observation and Fire

The German lines were situated on the high ground immediately west of the Rapido near Cassino and Sant' Angelo, as well as that south of the Liri valley near Sant' Ambrogio. Positions on the high ground gave the Germans the advantage in observation (especially Monte Cassino and the bluffs of Sant' Angelo) and in fields of fire. This was enhanced by the felling of trees and brush which otherwise would have obstructed observation and fire. The Germans capitalized on their superior fields of fire by establishing a series of machine gun installations along the ridge line parallel to the river so that their patterns of fire overlapped.

The Allied (American) side of the Rapido was low and flat, lacking appreciable vegetation for about a mile east of the river until higher ground was finally encountered. Exceptions were Monte Trocchio, the only good area of observation in American hands and Monte Porchia, but even these were quite distant from the river. This inferior position forced American units and equipment to stay two to five miles from the river; the superior German position also forced American operations to be conducted principally at night.

(b) Cover and Concealment

The Americans had no cover and concealment within a mile of the river suitable for concealing troops during daylight. This also caused men and equipment to be kept further back and for operations to be conducted at night.

The Germans had time to prepare and improve their positions to make best use of the cover and concealment on their side of the river. They took advantage of stone walls and buildings to shield their self-propelled artillery, mortars, and antitank guns. They created gun pits out of solid rock, constructed concrete bunkers, dug trenches, and performed other related measures to improve the survivability of their forces and equipment.

(c) Obstacles

Natural obstacles included the Rapido River, which connected with the Gari River and the Garigliano River in front of the Liri valley, Monte Cassino and the bluffs west of Sant' Angelo, and the muddy fields east of the Rapido. A series of manmade obstacles were integrated with them.

The Rapido River was about 40-50 feet wide, the water 8-12 feet deep, and the banks 3-4 feet vertically above the water level. The rate of flow was swift at about 4 mph and the water temperature was estimated to be a few degrees above freezing. The banks made entering and exiting the water difficult and the current made it difficult for inexperienced boatmen to traverse it, even with the assistance of crossing ropes. There were no bridges over the river in this area.

The high ground west of the Rapido, to include Monte Cassino, had steep grades which slowed attacking forces. A series of German strong points along this high ground provided a formidable obstacle which ran roughly parallel to the river from 300-800 yards away from the bank. Machine guns were placed to provide overlapping fields of fire along with bunkers and other protection for the defenders. Barbed wire was set up on the German side of the river to channel and fix attacking forces in the kill zone of rifles, machine guns, and

mortars. Furthermore, the Germans heavily mined both banks of the river, placing special emphasis on the emplacement of personnel mines in likely approaches. Artillery was positioned behind this line of strong points to enhance its value as an obstacle.

The flat fields adjacent to the river on the American side presented quite an obstacle in itself. They were extremely muddy and almost impassable. The few roads in the area were not solid enough to support loaded trucks or heavy vehicles; they were themselves muddy and in many places flooded. The mud was a result of previous rain and flooding from the river and was intensified by the Germans' manipulation of the runoff to create marshlike conditions on the plains.

The quantitative and qualitative effects of these obstacles was to create a powerful multiplier for the German defenses; it forced the attackers to concentrate on negotiating the obstacles while the defenders concentrated on the attackers.

(d) Key Terrain

The key terrain included Monte Cassino, the high ground around Sant' Angelo, and the high ground south of the Liri River near Sant' Ambrogio. This terrain controlled most of the area of operation, to include the Liri valley. This terrain was controlled by the Germans as part of the Gustov Line and was needed by the Allies if they were to send an armored thrust up the Liri valley.

(e) Avenues of Approach

There were no good avenues of approach within the area of operation for the 36th Division. MG Walker argued without success that the attack should take place across the Rapido where it was fordable, north of Cassino; he felt

that a surprise, daytime assault was possible there that could then cut Highway 6 west of Cassino and outflank the German positions around Sant' Angelo.

The 36th Division area presented only problems in approaching the German positions. The strong enemy defenses on dominating terrain, the unfordable river, the quagmire flats approaching the river, and the absence of cover and concealment, indicated that tactical operations would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

B. Comparison of Opposing Forces.

(1) Strength and Composition

The Gustav Line stretched the width of the Italian peninsula from near Minturno on the Tyrrhenian Sea to near Ortona on the Adriatic Sea. The German Tenth Army (XIV Panzer Corps in the south and LXXVI Panzer Corps in the north) manned this line, with two divisions under I Parachute Corps (about 25,000 men) kept as a reserve by Kesselring in the Rome area. About 90,000 men were in the Line in XIV Panzer Corps under General Frido von Senger, a former Rhodes scholar. Opposing the Gustav Line was the US Fifth Army in the south (composed of the British X Corps, US II Corps, and the French Expeditionary Corps) under LTG Clark, and the Eighth Army in the north (composed of the British XIII and V Corps) under General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery.

In the area of the Rapido the Germans had the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, a subordinate unit of XIV Panzer Corps. On the south of the 15th Division was the 94th Division.

The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division included the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion, and the 129th Panzer Grenadier

Regiment on the main defensive line; the 211th Grenadier Regiment was kept in reserve. The relative location of the units in the main defensive line varies depending on the source referred to. The 5th Army History gives one disposition while MG Walker in his later accounts gives a slightly different one; however, the units involved are the same. Also, the 5th Army History shows the disposition of units within the 15th Panzer Division changing slightly on 21 January from that of 20 January, although the units involved again remained the same. The Liri River and the limited road network precluded easy shifting of forces between the 15th Panzer Division area and that of the 94th Division. What is significant is the fact that 13 of the 15 battalions the German Corps and Army had in reserve in central Italy were on the north side of the Liri River to block a crossing of the Rapido River.

The Allied forces included the British Xth Corps, the US II Corps, and the French Expeditionary Forces. Specifically, opposite Sant' Ambrogio was the British 46th Division of the British Xth Corps, opposite Sant' Angelo was the US 36th Division, and opposite Cassino was the US 34th Division, with the French further north. Within the 36th Division area, the 143th Regiment was on the south and the 141st Regiment on the north, with the 142nd Regiment initially allocated to the Corps reserve. While a typical US infantry division numbered around 15,000 men, the 36th Division was still short about 500 men in each regiment due to losses from earlier action at Salerno.

Besides its three regiments, the 36th Division included the 36th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, the 36th Division Artillery, and the 111th Engineer Battalion. Attached to the 36th Division were the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 19th Engineer Regiment (Corps) (each battalion less one company), the

636th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 760th Tank Battalion, the 443rd AAA Battalion (less A Battery), A, B, and C Companies of the 2nd Chemical Weapons Battalion, and Companies A and B of the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion. The XII Air Support Command was assigned the responsibility for air support. Additionally, a substantial amount of Corps artillery was available on call. The 143rd and 141st Regiments were to be the principal maneuver elements for the 36th Division.

(2) Technology

By the winter of 1943 two opposite trends in technological advancement was becoming evident. The Allied forces, particularly the US, met or exceeded the previous German technological edge, while the Germans were slipping on quality in favor of quantity. With the new 155mm howitzer in theater, the US forces had a highly effective weapon. However, captured German 120mm mortar projectiles of recent manufacture, were found to be poorly made, although still effective enough to adequately serve German purposes in this operation.

There were several problems with US equipment that seriously hampered operations in crossing the Rapido, particularly with the boats and the bridging equipment. There were two types of boats used for the operation, one was the 6-ton pneumatic float and the other was the M-2 wooden assault boat. Both were common items in the engineer inventory, but they were inappropriate for this situation.

The 6-ton pneumatic float could carry 24 men, but required 14 of them to paddle, 7 to a side. Also, 4 men were required on shore to guide/pull it across a river using 1/2" or 3/4" diameter rope. Even with all this manpower, experience was required to successfully employ them. In a swift

current, as in the Rapido at this time, excessive drift would result and could lead to capsizing. This type of boat was hard to beach; in the absence of beaches, as at the Rapido, and in a swift current, it was hard to control for loading and unloading, especially if the banks were higher than a foot or two. Being rubber and inflated, it was especially vulnerable to bullets and shrapnel. At the Rapido this boat didn't last very long; what wasn't riddled with holes was swept away with the current, usually with a loss of lives and accompanying equipment. The use of these floats to support improvised foot bridges fared no better.

The M-2 wooden assault boat was square-sterned, flat-bottomed, and heavy. It was 13 feet long, 5 feet wide, and weighed 410 pounds. It held 12 men and required a crew of 2. They were carried normally in 2 1/2 ton trucks, 7 per truck, but for this operation they were carried by hand. They were awkward to carry for any distance, especially the several-miles required for this mission. Again the difficulty of loading and unloading down the steep banks and the swift current was a serious problem.

There were no footbridging sets available, so some were improvised using pneumatic floats and catwalk material. They were preassembled several miles from the river and carried by the assault troops. They were difficult to install and keep operational. Even the few employed were difficult to use due to the slippery surface and the lack of handrails. Direct and indirect fire chewed them up.

The result of these problems with the boats and bridging was to limit the number of men crossing the river and to delay the movement of those few who could cross.

(3) Logistical and Administrative Systems

Logistical support of the Italian campaign was a problem for both the Germans and the Allies. Since reinforcements for the German Forces in Italy were not available, the German High Command recognized that they could not win back territory lost in the south. Consequently, Feldmarschall Kesselring began construction of fortified lines across the peninsula between Naples and Rome in September 1943. Allied bombing of major highways and rail lines hindered the forward movement of construction supplies. In addition, the scarcity of good roads and the presence of rugged terrain presented serious obstacles. Pack mules were used extensively to move supplies in the mountains; in the German 10th Army area alone, at least 200 mules were used.

While manufacture of some demolition aids was done in the industrial north of Italy, the majority of these items had to be brought by train from Germany. There was a lumber shortage for constructing fortifications, causing delays until early November. Also, there were not enough engineer units to meet construction demands, which resulted in the use of front line troops. While this reduced the number of troops that could be sent forward, it did raise confidence among the fighting soldiers because they knew the positions they were building would probably help save their lives. Also, although the Italians had surrendered in September, they were not adverse to helping the Germans. Hence, the Germans were able to acquire some of the class I, III, and IV items they required from the Italian industrial north.

After Salerno the supply situation tightened for the Allies in Italy. Other theaters were competing for resources and the buildup for the projected invasion of Normandy was consuming an ever increasing amount of materiel.

While the Italian campaign was supported as an important effort, that did not often translate into the needed priorities for supplies, ships, and personnel at the critical times in Italy. The effort was resourced sufficiently enough to keep it slowly grinding along.

For the US and Allied forces the supply lifeline extended through Naples. The battle to the Gustav Line had been long and difficult for the Allies. The smaller German force had taken advantage of the key terrain in fighting a series of delays while withdrawing to the North. The road and rail network in southern Italy was also very limited. The Germans destroyed bridges and mined roads to hinder the Allied advance. In the 5th Army area alone, the engineers were using an average of 300,000 board feet of lumber per month, still far short of what was actually needed for construction and bridging. Despite some local acquisition of class IV items the sources could not meet the demand. In addition, the rainy season and rugged terrain hampered supply movement. Frequently the roads became so muddy that it was impossible for vehicles to move; pack mules and manual labor were employed to fill the gap in moving supplies. Boots wore out in the rugged terrain in a couple of days. By November class II (clothing) had become the number one priority at Naples.

When the 36th Division reentered the frontline in mid-November, it was raining heavily, soaking the troops and slowing movement. When the temperature dropped, most men were still wet and had not eaten hot food. Newly constructed bypasses turned into mud traps for vehicles and steep terrain casued supplies to be hand-carried in many places. At the end of the year, the 36th Division moved to the rear to get replacements and to prepare for the Rapido.

Anticipating the Rapido mission, MG Walker on 4 January 1944 directed his division engineer, LTC Stovall, to survey the assault area to determine what the engineers could do and what materials were needed to assist in the river crossing. In his survey LTC Stovall found engineer supplies almost nonexistent and standard footbridging not available. To solve this problem he concluded that each of the two combat engineer battalions, the 111th Combat Engineer Battalion and the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion, would need to have at least 30 pneumatic floats and 20 wooden assault boats, in addition to the 19 wooden and 13 pneumatic boats each combat engineer battalion normally had in stock. They were also required to improvise 4 footbridges to support their respective assaulting infantry regiment. As Stovall saw it, each engineer battalion would help the infantry get this equipment into the proper place for the attack and facilitate the troop crossing, construct a treadway bridge for vehicles, and after the capture of Sant' Angelo erect a large Bailey bridge. For the Rapido operation, the engineers managed to get 100 additional boats of each type.

Because the weight and bulk of the boats and bridging made hand carrying difficult, they were usually transported by trucks to the crossing site. But, at the Rapido, the few roads available could not support 2 1/2 ton trucks. Although it had not rained during the 10 days prior to the operation, previous rain and river runoff had made the ground too soft for vehicular traffic. Also, lights and the sound of vehicles at night attracted German fire and in the daytime, despite poor visibility, the Germans could observe vehicular movement. Therefore, the assaulting troops had to carry crossing equipment a very long distance.

While the problem with visibility reduced the amount of firing the US artillery did, it is interesting to note that the ammunition available for the US forces was actually quite small, although, as it turned out, sufficient under the circumstances. The 155mm howitzer, for example, was limited to 40 rounds per tube per day. Also, MG Walker's decision to limit the artillery preparatory fires for the attack to 30 minutes was due to ammunition constraints. This reflected the fact that ammo was still having to make its way from Naples, a difficult trip given the transportation situation. Not only were the roads few and the course twisted, but the condition of the roads quickly deteriorated with use and required constant stabilization efforts to keep them passable.

The 36th Infantry Division came to the Rapido operation with three infantry regiments: the 141st, 142nd, and 143rd. The authorized strength of an infantry regiment at this time was approximately 4000 men. The division was reasonably rested and the veteran members well-trained and experienced in combat; however, each regiment was under-strength at the beginning of the Rapido operation due to losses preceding the division's last withdrawal from the line (la Difensa, Maggiore, Monte Lungo, San Pietro, Sammucro). Each infantry regiment had lost nearly 1000 men each; however, replacements only covered half of these losses. As a result, each regiment was at approximately 88% of authorized strength--that is, still short 500 men. The replacements were inexperienced and untested in combat, and by their numbers seriously diluted the experience and cohesion of the assault regiments. The difficulty of the operation and the not fully assimilated state of these replacements was an unfortunate combination upon which to base hopes of success.

The Germans appear to have been at a high proportion of fill and with experienced troops.

(4) Command, Control, and Communication Systems

The 36th Division was probably as well organized as the available forces and doctrine of the time permitted it to be. There is some question, however, whether all the resources were effectively used to achieve maximum combat power effect. Much of this was due to external factors: the failure of 5th Army to adjust the mission of the 36th Division in response to the British failure to secure the key terrain on the south side of the Liri River and the inadequacies of the bridging material given the enemy and obstacle disposition. But, other factors within the control or direct responsibility of the 36th Division also came into play. These included inadequate rehearsals with the engineers and the troops they were supporting and the absence of a more positive view toward mission success. Overall the staff organization was consistent with doctrine of the day and it had the experience of nearly 5 months of successful combat operations.

There was some isolation between the 36th Division headquarters and higher levels that was due to personality and philosophical differences between commanders and this may have affected counterpart operations between staffs. It certainly had an effect on the amount and effectiveness of communication between those commanders, both in degree of openness and completeness of expression and in the extent which Walker was aware of the motivation and intent of higher level plans. Also, the difficulties of the planning and control of combined operations manifested itself within the British X Corps: first, in the lack of support for Keyes alternative plan to move the main

effort to the south of the Liri and second, in the dribble approach of force commitment the British employed.

Whether the mission given the 36th Division was realistic is debatable given the terrain and enemy dispositions. Certainly the missions Walker gave to his two assaulting regiments for the initial attack were simple and correct given the division's mission. However, the push by Clark and Keyes for a daylight second attack, after the serious losses of the first and without reconsideration of the rationale for it, was not in our judgement realistic at all. While the desire for opening the Liri Valley for an armored thrust was still unfulfilled, the purpose of the attack to fix the German forces which could endanger the Anzio landing had already been more than successful by drawing to the line Kesselring's two reserve divisions in the area opposite the British.

There was also a serious problem in the 36th Division's communications with its subordinate units. The principal means was field phone, but German fire cut the lines. The backup was radio, but these were either damaged or lost in the confusion of the assault. There were a few pigeons available for emergencies with the assaulting regiments, but their loft was at II Corps headquarters, meaning some delay in getting the word down to division as to what the message contained. The only real alternative was messenger, but messengers got lost easily in the poor visibility, if they survived at all. It is not hard to understand the difficulty that existed in controlling and supporting the battle when communications were practically nonexistent.

The Germans were in a much better situation. They had the benefit of choosing their place of battle and planning for it. They organized the

terrain and their forces well. They put their best and most experienced troops in the line. Their mission was simple and realistic and fit well with the terrain and forces available to them. Their communications were well entrenched and did not suffer the deterioration the 36th Division experienced.

(5) Intelligence

The intelligence developed by the Allies in advance of the Rapido operation gave a surprising amount of detail concerning the Gustov Line itself; enough to show that the Germans were no longer just delaying, but rather switching to a static defense. Some of this was revealed by aerial photographic intelligence taken over the months that preceded the assault. Still more details came from knowledgeable prisoners of war and from Italian civilians who knew information on troop movements, obstacles, and fortifications. This was consolidated, analyzed, and disseminated by 5th Army HQ through various intelligence reports to subordinate commands, to include the 36th Division. Therefore, it was generally recognized by 5th Army and lower echelons that the Rapido area was defended by an experienced, formidable, well-entrenched force having significant terrain advantages. The strength of the German positions was confirmed through extensive patrolling conducted by the 36th Division the last three nights before the attack. Despite knowledge of a fordable site at a weaker area to the north, the 5th Army Command stuck to its plan to cross near Sant' Angelo. It was accepted by LTG Clark that the losses would be heavy, but the need to quickly get access to the Liri valley was in his opinion paramount.

That was the higher level intelligence picture; the detail necessary to conduct a successful tactical operation at division and corps level was

tougher to come by. For instance, observers could not precisely determine the location of German artillery because the visibility was so poor and the German artillery was generally silent until the attack began; even then the Germans frequently relocated their guns under cover of the haze and smoke. Also, US patrols were unable to penetrate very far on the west bank of the river. To make matters worse, on the second day of the attack the US forces put out too much smoke, hindering US artillery forward observers far more than the Germans.

With their superior vantage points on Monte Cassino, the bluffs of Sant' Angelo, and the high ground south of the Liri, the Germans had excellent combat intelligence sources on troop movements across the low, open areas used by the Allies. As the German objective was to stop the Allies along the Gustav Line, this served their needs quite well, even considering the reduced visibility affecting both parties. The superior defensive positions and obstacle scheme, to include the river, gave them more than enough delay capability to react to short range information and neutralize whatever threat developed. In short, they weren't surprised. What they apparently did not or could not appreciate was the coincident landing at Anzio and the need to keep their strategic reserve available to handle that threat as opposed to committing it to the Gustav Line. As it was, they did not react to Anzio until after the 36th Division's assault had failed.

(6) Doctrine and Training

German doctrine of this time stressed the use of combined arms, to include the integration of tactical air support with ground forces. They practiced the techniques of massed armored attacks thrusting for targets deep in enemy territory while recognizing the value of accompanying infantry. But not all

terrain was suitable for armored warfare and they recognized this.

In late 1943 the Germans in Italy were forced to fight a delaying action in rugged terrain. This dictated the use of infantry forces supported primarily by artillery and engineers. They used their experienced troops skillfully in attriting Allied forces while keeping their own losses low, yielding ground grudgingly, but without becoming decisively engaged. They astutely used factors comparable to METT in choosing and developing the Gustav Line, and then put their best and most experienced people on it, the ones who had skillfully fought the delay to the line and those who had built it. They kept a small reserve to react to problems that might develop in defending that line.

The Allies were transitioning to a combined arms approach. The US leadership was incorporating the philosophy of massed armored thrusts and moving toward an integrated combined arms operation. This was not without problems, such as infantry-engineer coordination and cooperation, but efforts were being made. Also, the utility of amphibious assaults had been proven and imagination in their use created concepts for deep coastal landings behind formidable ground lines that had grown static; there was a recognition that a ground linkup was necessary to assure long term survival of the deep assault force.

Although Italy was primarily an infantryman's battle, Clark combined these concepts to tackle the Gustav Line and keep the drive for Rome alive. Calling for an amphibious assault at Anzio, he planned for his best infantry division to breach the Gustav Line near the one good corridor suitable for an armored thrust for linking up with the Anzio force. His corps commander beefed up the

division with additional combat and combat support units consistent with what he felt was needed for the job. Indeed, this was the triangular division concept McNair had developed in action.

At the division level things looked a little different. It seemed almost every rule in the book was being broken. German forces were firmly entrenched in prepared positions atop dominating terrain protected by interacting obstacles that included a fast-moving unfordable river that was covered by fire and for which the approach was exposed for an extended distance. Add to this poor mobility due to soft ground, poor visibility, and the knowledge that a better crossing area existed elsewhere, then one sees how doubt as to professional competence of higher command can arise. This could hardly have been improved by the incident that occurred on 21 January when Corps ordered a second assault after an already costly initial effort, but this time in daylight, or by the direction to send the third remaining regiment down the same gauntlet.

The 36th Division may have been the best and most experienced as a unit and in its leadership, but it had latent problems in cohesiveness and uniformity of experience caused by a large influx of new replacements. Also, as a unit it had no satisfactory experience with the boats it would be using for the crossing; while some training was conducted, it was under conditions dissimilar to that which they would be employed and with one of the regiments different.

(7) Condition and Morale

The German forces fought a deliberate delaying action up the Italian peninsula after the successful entry of Allied forces at Salerno. In doing

this they had the advantage of terrain and choice of place for battle. They sought to inflict maximum loss in forces, materiel, and time while not becoming decisively engaged themselves. In this they were quite successful, buying the necessary time to complete the Gustav Line and to man it, while preserving their own forces.

Opposing the 36th Division was the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. Senger, the XIV Panzer Corps commander, would point out later that the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was the best he had; it had his finest soldiers and an outstanding division commander and staff.

The time the delay bought paid substantial dividends when the Rapido River operation took place in January 1944. Having the advantage of terrain, prepared positions, and experienced troops, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division repelled the 36th Division assault with minimal losses. They did not even need to call in local reserves to help. Recognizing the importance of their mission, the forces had been constantly alert and confident in the protection their position afforded them. During the several truce periods that occurred during those two days, the Germans expressed their amazement to the American casualty gathering parties they assisted that the 36th Division would persist in such a clearly foolhardy effort to dislodge them. They warned that the US forces would only suffer more casualties and fail to gain their objective. Senior German leadership could not imagine that this was anything more than a wasteful probing action, so secure did they feel in their position in this particular area.

To better understand the situation of the 36th Infantry Division it is useful to start with their arrival in Italy. The 36th Infantry Division's

first commitment to battle occurred at Salerno on 9 September 1943. It was an assault landing against serious German opposition. Twelve days of combat established the division as an effective one and gave its men confidence, transitioning them from inexperienced troops to combat veterans and forging unity among the men and with their commander.

The operation had been costly, however, with the division losing 2000 men. Additionally, the performances of Walker's assistant division commander and G3 had been inadequate. Walker replaced both, the former with Brigadier General William H. Wilbur and the latter with his older son, Lieutenant Colonel Fred L. Walker, Jr., an infantry battalion commander at Salerno. Both assignments were probably ill-advised. Wilbur's personality was in marked contrast to the divisional mold. In the other case, the appointment of Walker's son as G-3 smacked of nepotism; it appeared to some that the father had moved his son out of harm's way to a less dangerous job.

After Salerno, the 36th Division was brought out of the front lines to rest, train, and receive replacements for its battle casualties; however, the shortage of combat units overall meant that it was soon back in the line for the slow and costly fighting up the peninsula.

The harshness of the weather and terrain in Italy in December 1943 did not spare the 36th Infantry Division. Walker unhappily recorded the condition of his soldiers as "wet, cold, muddy, hungry, no sleep, no rest...I do not understand how the men continue to keep going under their existing conditions of hardship". Relief came at the end of December 1943 when the 36th Division was pulled out of the front line to rest, receive replacements, and refit in preparation for its commitment at the Rapido. Morale, under the circumstances, remained relatively high.

In the action up to that point, the 36th Division had lost about 1000 men in each of its regiments; about half of those losses were now made up by replacements. The replacements were mostly inexperienced troops out of initial training; there were so many replacements in the assault regiments that those units ceased to be cohesive, becoming collections of strangers who would receive their initial combat experience during the most difficult of combat operations: a night river crossing. There was no illusion that the operation would be easy from a tactical perspective. Overlooking the area of proposed operations was the height of Monte Cassino, where, the troops of the 36th Infantry Division were convinced, German artillery observers could observe their movements and quickly bring artillery fire to bear on their ranks. The situation as a whole was to gnaw at the troops morale.

There was possibly, however, an even more insidious, though unintended, detriment to the morale of the 36th Division's soldiers. Walker harbored serious reservations about the success of the operation. The depth of Walker's uneasiness was evidently never made completely known to either Keyes or Clark, although he did express his objections and misgivings on the plans on several occasions. When Walker finally acquiesced to the plan, Keyes assumed that Walker's earlier objections had been overcome. They were not, of course, and his closeness with his troops may have betrayed his reservations to his men. His private thoughts that "we might succeed but I do not see how we can", may have been evident to the very soldiers whose lives he wanted to protect. We do know that some of Walker's troops believed as he did, which is understandable given the terrain, weather, and enemy dispositions, and that this would continue to undermine the morale of the men of the 36th Division

throughout the operation at the Rapido. In the words of a soldier with the 143rd Infantry Regiment, "The infantrymen...didn't like night fighting and lacked confidence in their ability to knock out the enemy in a night engagement."

The casualties at the Rapido River were heavy. In two days of combat, 20-22 January 1944, the 36th Infantry Division suffered 1681 casualties: 143 KIA, 663 WIA, 875 MIA.

(8) Leadership

The German military leadership was very capable. Time and again its perceptiveness to tactical possibilities was proven, such as in the case of the defensive lines south of Rome. It was Kesselring who noted this possibility, and it was Kesselring who convinced Berlin of the advantages of taking a stand there as opposed to the north of Italy. Of course, Hitler and his immediate staff often interjected other considerations or plans at odds with the tactical situation, but on this occasion Hitler gave Kesselring permission to delay, and subsequently to defend, south of Rome. The defensive lines reflected ample consideration of realistic factors along the lines of METT. In fighting the delay mission to the defensive lines, the Germans showed considerable skill in conserving forces while buying maximum time and inflicting heavy casualties.

Like the US, the German military had run its own General Staff College for many years, producing many of the key staff officers for the field armies. In addition, the professional military officer corps included many who had received the benefit of special or well rounded civilian education; for example, the commander of XIV Panzer Corps in the Gustav Line, General von Senger, was a former Rhodes scholar.

To adequately understand the leadership climate of the Allies, particularly the 36th Division, it is necessary to begin with an examination of the pre-war background of the unit and its leaders.

The 36th Infantry Division, a unit of the Texas National Guard, was federalized in November 1940. In September 1941, then Brigadier General Fred L. Walker took command of the division. Walker and his new division worked hard to produce a well-trained and effective organization; in the process he and his men became quite close and developed tremendous respect for one another. This was not surprising, as Walker had had a very successful and diverse military career, and was well thought of within the Army. In fact, it was the Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, who had given him command of the division along with the charge to transform it into an effective unit.

Unlike many career officers of the time, Walker was not a West Point graduate, being educated instead at Ohio State University; a point which left him feeling uncomfortable in gatherings where a West Point background was more highly valued. Joining the Regular Army in 1911 as an infantry second lieutenant, he saw service in the Philippines, with Pershing's Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa in Texas and Mexico, and with the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in France during World War I. As a battalion commander in the 3rd Infantry Division, he won the Distinguished Service Cross for exceptional combat leadership at the Battle of the Marne, an action in which his battalion repelled a German river crossing. This action was to be especially pertinent in forming his opinion of the Rapido a World War later.

Walker attended CGSC and the Army War College in the years between the World Wars. Through a series of staff and troop assignments he developed

expertise in planning, tactics and logistics, and a reputation as an exceptionally effective trainer. It was natural that when the Army was looking for commanders for the newly federalized National Guard divisions that they would look for good trainers; the new divisions needed good training and lots of it. This was usually accompanied by liberal replacement of the unit's senior National Guard commanders and staff officers, but Walker chose to keep his. The wisdom of his decision was sustained during a successful series of subsequent War Department tests and inspections. In recognition for his abilities, Walker was promoted to Major General.

In September 1943 the 36th Division began a series of battles in Italy in which it both proved itself and gained valuable experience, beginning with the successful amphibious assault at Salerno. It was also the beginning of the association of the 36th Division with Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, the 5th US Army commander.

The prevailing opinion regarding Clark, held by at least some of his contemporaries, was something less than flattering. To be sure, professional jealousies over Clark's rapid rise to the command of an American field army, LTC to LTG in 2 years, had something to do with his critics' motivations. The gist of the criticism was that Clark's rapid rise had deprived him of an appreciation for the problems confronted by division and regimental commanders. An "aggressive, impatient, imperious" personality coupled with a penchant for self-promotion did little to win him friends. He did have some undeniable qualities, among them physical and mental endurance, complex problem solving abilities, a quick mind, and intense concentration.

There are a number of contrasts between Clark and Walker. Walker was

older by 9 years and had 6 years more service. Until the grade of Major General, Walker had always been senior to Clark. Now suddenly a Lieutenant General, Clark was Walker's boss. Walker was a quiet and soft-spoken man; Clark, however, was outspoken to the point of occasional brashness. Despite these differences, Walker was a professional who paid the chain of command its due, although it would be reasonable to believe that some feeling of mutual self-consciousness existed.

Clark "kept his distance" from his subordinates, perhaps more than would be expected due to his position. Clark was not one to ask his subordinates for advice, nor was his style characterized by informal problem-solving discussions with his commanders. If Clark's behavior chagrined his people, they were, nevertheless, impressed by his cool competence and calm demeanor.

Between Clark's 5th Army and Walker's 36th Division was an intervening level of command, II Corps. Arriving in Italy in time for the operations of December 1943, II Corps was under the command of Major General Geoffrey T. Keyes; accordingly, Keyes was Walker's boss. Unfortunately, neither took to the other very well, although neither indicated it to the other openly.

Keyes, a cavalryman, was a year younger than Walker and eight years older than Clark. Keyes had no combat experience in World War I; he was, however, a well-read and well-educated tactical theoretician. Keyes is remembered as "perceptive, pleasant and tactful". On a professional plane, he had a flair for tactics. Walker, the experienced infantry practitioner, however, saw Keyes' tactical theories as well as his personality as "too impulsive, restless, and flighty"--in short, he considered Keyes a gambler.

Much more so than his superiors, Walker's primary feeling of

responsibility was to his soldiers. He avoided II Corps and 5th Army headquarters and kept a low profile. He viewed visitors, official or otherwise, as a distraction from "tactical demands". A disadvantage resulting from this attitude was a tunnel vision effect as to how the division operations fit into higher level plans. While the purpose of the Rapido operation in the drive for Rome may have been clear to Clark in the context of the Anzio assault, to include the availability window for the boats to support that assault, there is little evidence to show that Walker had the benefit of a wide perspective on the matter. One useful by-product of liaison trips to higher headquarters is the opportunity to glean information higher command may have neglected to adequately share.

These divergent personalities, opposing tactical outlooks, and jealousies eventually combined to cause Walker to question the competence, if not the motives, of his superiors. In any event, Walker kept his own counsel on such matters, prizing loyal professionalism in the conduct of all matters.

The cumulative effect of these intertwined personalities, including the personalities of those within the 36th Infantry Division itself, was to have a significant influence on the operations at the Rapido River.

C. Immediate Military Objectives.

The Germans initially wanted to slow the Allied advance to permit their forces to withdraw to the north; however, recognition of a strong defensive possibility led to a decision to stop the Allied advance south of Rome. To do this they needed to fight a delay slowly back to the defensive lines they were building across the width of the peninsula, buying time for their completion, inflicting maximum losses on the Allied forces, and preserving their own

forces as much as possible to permit maximum manning of the lines once completed. The final defensive line would have to be very strong--organized in depth and taking maximum advantage of terrain. All these things they did; these actions supported their tactical and strategic goals quite well, at least initially.

The mission of the Allied forces was to move quickly up the Italian peninsula before the Germans could consolidate a defense. The hope was that in so doing the Germans would be forced to tie down their forces in Italy and possibly reinforce them from the Russian front and the English Channel defenses. The key objective to accomplishing this mission was the early capture of Rome. When the fighting bogged down on the approach to the Gustav Line, several immediate objectives were set: an amphibious assault deep behind the Gustav Line at ^{ANZIO} ~~Znaio~~; an attack on the Gustav Line near the Liri Valley to fix German forces on the line, draw reserves away from Rome toward the line and away from Anzio, and to breach the line itself; and the thrust of an armored force through the breach in the line to link up with the force at Anzio. While all this was consistent with the overall mission, there was a problem at the tactical level. The division making the initial breach of the Gustav Line would be making an assault from a seriously inferior terrain position (no cover and concealment, no key terrain, defender having the advantage in observation and fields of fire, defender has prepared obstacles and an unfordable river to protect it, defender has effective and integrated fire plan, attacker has mobility problems, etc.) against prepared positions.

D. Feasible Courses of Action.

The Germans really had only one main course of action--to defend along the

Gustav Line. This, of course, was consistent with their overall mission. They fully appreciated the factors of METT and prepared their positions well. There were of course several options with respect to the use of Kesselring's reserves: he could do as he did and commit both divisions to the area of the 94th Division, or commit only one and hold the other. The choice depended on what the perceived threat was. If one believed the British 46th Division was making the main attack in what was a thinly defended area of the line with no easy way to shift troops laterally, then one would have done as Kesselring did. If on the other hand, one believed that the main attack would be across the Rapido by the 36th Division coupled with an attack at Anzio, then probably a single division, or part thereof, would have been sufficient to hold the 94th Division's area with the other division kept in reserve to at least conduct a holding action at Anzio until forces could be shifted. As it was, the Germans were astonished that the main attack came from the 36th Division and that they vainly persisted at so high a cost.

The Allies had three courses of action to choose from to support the armored thrust down the Liri Valley:

- (1) To cross the Rapido in the 36th Division area, secure the high ground around Sant' Angelo, and open the approach to the Liri Valley.
- (2) To cross the Rapido north of Cassino where it was fordable, cut Highway 6, and attack the prepared German positions near the Liri from the flank.
- (3) To cross the Garigliano near Sant' Ambrogio to secure the high ground on the south side of the Liri.

The least desirable was the one first attempted, the crossing in the 36th

Division's area. Clark and Keyes recognized that it would be a costly option, but the desire for a quick advance into the Liri Valley caused them to not weigh the disadvantages there very heavily; it was known to be the strongest enemy area. The second option, crossing the Rapido to the north where it was fordable, was the one favored by Walker, and in fact, the one that was successful when tried several days later; there were disadvantages to this option to be sure, but the factors of METT were more favorable there than where the first attempt was made.

The third option was actually tried but only as a supporting attack for the first option because of resistance from the British commander. Coupled with the British "gradualism" technique, the opportunity to penetrate the Gustav Line where the German defenders were spread thinnest was lost before it was fully recognized. Any of the three could have been, and were, successful in pinning down German forces in the line. All except the option first tried were realistic in opening the Liri valley approach. None, in Walker's opinion, would realize a fast armored thrust because he saw the Liri Valley as a deceptively slow slugfest with German counterattack forces.

IV. The Fight

A. Disposition of Forces.

Kesselring, the German Commander in Chief in Italy was confident that he could stop the allies at the Gustav Line. He commanded two armies, one installed in northern Italy and the other in the south. General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, the Tenth Army commander, was responsible for two corps operating in southern Italy, one in the east coast sector, the other in the west. Defending the approaches to Rome in the western part of Italy was the XIV

Panzer Corps, commanded by General Frido von Senger. He had about 90,000 troops defending along the Gustav Line. In the Rome area, directly under Kesselring, were about 25,000 men--two divisions of the I Parachute Corps. This reserve force was available to Kesselring primarily to counteract an Allied amphibious landing operation, but actions on the Rapido river forced their commitment into the Gustav Line. The main line of resistance in the Gustav Line was the far side of the Rapido River, field fortifications designated by the Germans as the final line of defense south of Rome. The defensive works were firmly fixed in the high ground east and west of the Liri valley, on the steep and barren slopes of Monte Cassino behind the Rapido, and in the hills around Saint Ambrogio behind the Gorigliano River. Weapons pits, concrete bunkers, steel-turreted machine gun emplacements, barbed wire, mortars and machine guns existed in profusion. These positions also covered the relatively low ground behind the Rapido, where the Liri valley starts. There also, the Germans had erected defenses centered on the village of Sant'Angelo. In the town of Cassino and the villages of Sant'Angelo and Sant'Ambrogio they had strengthened the walls of the stone buildings with sandbags to protect weapons crews. From the hills above Cassino, particularly from Monte Cassino, the Germans had clear observation of the approaching Allied forces. Very heavy rains had caused the rivers to overflow their banks, flooding much of the lowland, and the Germans had made matters worse by diverting the Rapido to create an artificial marsh, a bog too soft in most places for vehicles.

The Germans initially appeared to have no intention of fighting a decisive battle in southern Italy. They were moving ground and air units out of these

areas and back to the Pisa-Rimini region, where they were constructing strong defenses. They were expected to retire from Naples to field fortifications they were building around Cassino to cover Rome and to deny the use of its airfields to the Allies. They were expected to withdraw further to the Apennines when the positions there were made ready. So the first allied objective was Rome, 120 miles north of Naples. Once in Rome, the Allied troops would strike toward Pisa and Rimini. In early October, however, the intelligence estimate changed. Several German divisions were noted coming down from northern Italy to reinforce the troops opposing the allied advance beyond Naples. The Germans had decided to stand fast in excellent defensive ground south of Rome and turn the drive on Rome into a protracted campaign. As far as Eisenhower was concerned, the minimum acceptable stopping position for the Allied advance was a position well north of Rome. Thus, the die was cast and the push north along the peninsula would continue at least until Rome was secured. As far as the Rapido River operation is concerned, the amphibious landing at Anzio was of primary importance. Since Eisenhower's order to capture Rome implied an amphibious landing, Anzio was chosen. The Rapido operation was to assist the Anzio operation by drawing units away from Rome, thereby taking the pressure off the Anzio landing and allowing those forces to linkup, cut the German lines of communication and proceed on to Rome. Therefore, an attack across the Rapido became necessary as an adjunct to the Anzio operation in order to ensure its success.

On 12 January, the French Expeditionary Corps on the right was to cross the upper Rapido and move into and through the massive high ground immediately behind Cassino, high ground that overlooks the Liri valley from the east. On

17 January, the British X Corps on the left was to cross the Gorigliano River at two places and control two bridgeheads, one near the coast around Minturno, the other near Sant'Ambrogio. The latter was the important crossing, and from there British troops were to move east and take the high ground overlooking the Liri valley from the west. On 20 January, the II Corps, using the 36th Division under General Walker's command, was to deliver the final blow by crossing the Rapido River near Sant'Angelo and advance into the Liri valley. Two days later, on 22 January, when the VI Corps was to come ashore at Anzio, it was hoped that the American troops would be in the Liri valley racing toward the beachhead for a linkup.

B. Opening Moves.

A key point in this discussion is the part played by the British General McCreery and his X Corps. Since the US attack across the Rapido stood little chance unless the high ground on both sides of the valley were under Allied control, General McCreery had been assigned the mission of crossing his units to the east of the Rapido two days prior to the US crossing. McCreery had little confidence in his ability to succeed in this mission and decided to hazard only one division in the effort, the British 46th. In addition, McCreery's plan delayed the assault by one day which would further hinder his ability to support the US crossing of the Rapido. He could not hope to attain the high ground in one day. The II Corps commander, General Keyes, was outraged when he heard what McCreery proposed. The timing, forces committed, and selection of objectives for the British 46th Division were all wrong. Keyes felt that McCreery and his British troops could do far more than they intended to help his II Corps, specifically the 36th Division, get across the

Rapido. Keyes protested vigorously to General Clark. He also wanted to delay his attack for one day if McCreery did not change his plans. Clark refused this request. Keyes had little confidence in the X Corps effort because of what he termed "British unwillingness to launch attacks in force." The British employed a tactical doctrine that he called "gradualism"--a platoon would probe an enemy position; if it succeeded, a company would follow; if the company did the job, a battalion would be committed, and so on. To be of real help to the 36th Division, the 46th Division had to make a strong crossing with most of its strength committed at once. Only a large-scale effort could attract and engage German reserves, and this, plus the capture of the ridge above Sant'Ambrogio, would make the Rapido crossing feasible. Unless the 46th gave the real assistance that the 36th needed, the Rapido River operation would not succeed. However, because of the moonless nights during this period, the Germans did not expect an attack and when the 46th made their move the Germans were caught by surprise. As a consequence, McCreery's attack which jumped off at 2100 hours, 17 January, achieved a good measure of success near the coast. Under the protection of a heavy artillery and naval barrage, ten battalions of British infantry crossed the Gorigliano during the first 24 hours of the operation and made a serious breach in the Gustav Line. The Germans realized that they would be unable to contain the British attack, and General Senger requested that the two division being held in the Rome area be sent to the Gorigliano. The Germans feared that they might lose the high ground overlooking the Liri valley from the west. There the British could have them outflanked and would threaten Monte Cassino, make the Gustav Line untenable all along its length, and prompt the German Tenth Army to withdraw

to and beyond Rome. The end result was that Kesselring sent the two divisions from Rome to support the Gustav Line. The troops arrived in increasing numbers on 19 and 20 January and they prevented the British from expanding their Gorigliano bridgehead.

The introduction of the new German troops also resulted in the failure of the British to execute their supporting attack crossing for the 36th Division at the junction of the Liri and Gori rivers. This inability of the 46th Division to get across and take a bridgehead near Sant'Ambrogio was a significant blow to the 36th effort. Now when the 36th attacked across the Rapido, its left flank would be exposed and vulnerable to German counterattack. With the high ground around Sant'Ambrogio still in German hands, the entrance into the Liri valley remained under direct German observation. General Walker was disappointed over the 46th Division's failure and this intensified his own doubts about the 36th's chances of success. Some thought that the crossing should be cancelled, but General Clark insisted, saying, "that it is essential that I make that attack fully expecting heavy losses in order to hold the German troops on my front and draw more to it, thereby clearing the way for Anzio." What General Clark did not know was that the purposes of his attack had already in a large part been accomplished. By crossing the lower Gorigliano, the British had nailed down the Germans defending the Gustav Line; in addition, they had drawn two German divisions away from the vicinity of the Anzio landing beaches. Even if Clark had realized this, he would, in all probability have directed the Rapido crossing. He still needed to get into the Liri valley for the drive to Frosinone and beyond, to link up with the Anzio troops who were to come ashore on 22 January.

The immediate problem for the 36th Division was the absence of good covered approaches to the river. The troops had to cross a wide and open flood plain, now partially submerged, before they reached the river. Smoke shells and smoke pots if used extensively, could probably block German observation from Sant'Angelo, but nothing could be done about the commanding height of Monte Cassino which allowed direct observation of the crossing sites. The only way to escape the devastating artillery fire that observers could bring down on troops approaching the river was to make a night attack. This was what Walker had planned. When darkness fell on 20 January, after a heavy artillery preparation lasting 30 minutes, two regiments would attempt to cross.

Walker's main objection to conducting the attack in this situation was that it violated published doctrine of the time. Making a frontal attack across an unfordable river with inadequate crossing materials while the high ground is under enemy control violated all the tenets of sound tactics and appalled General Walker. He had been in a previous battle under similar circumstances, but on the defense, and had destroyed German units attempting to conduct a river crossing against his unit. He could see history repeating itself and lacked confidence that his attack would work. His attitude probably affected his officers and men and had a bearing on the ultimate failure of the attack.

The engineer effort during the battle deserves mention because it also contributed greatly to the failure of the operation. To give assault infantrymen and supporting engineers practice in handling the river crossing equipment, two infantry regiments of the 36th Division and the engineer units

participated in a training exercise at the Volturno River. One regiment later reported that the rehearsal was very successful and gave confidence to unit commanders. Walker, however, found the rehearsal, which was conducted by members of the 5th Army staff, "of little or no value because of the different characteristics of the two rivers." He said that little was taught besides methods of carrying, launching, and rowing the boats on a placid stream which had low banks. For this reason he was not concerned when he made a change in the units he selected for the assault. He had sent the 142d and 143d Infantry regiments to the rehearsal, but later decided to substitute the 141st for the 142d in order to equalize the amount of combat among his three regiments. The 142d would remain in reserve at the Rapido, while the two others would cross the river. The 5th Army Engineer, BG Bowman, believed that Walker was wrong to change his assault regiments, feeling that Walker had broken up a well-trained infantry-engineer team. The commander of the engineer battalion also criticized Walker. He said that technical problems of crossing a river were hardly discussed nor was he called upon to offer observations or suggestions on the infantry participation in the rehearsal. He felt this denoted an absence of real cooperation between infantrymen and engineers, a lack of real knowledge on the part of one on what exactly the other was supposed to do and was capable of doing. Teamwork, together with forceful direction was absent during this river crossing.

An insight into MG Walker's feelings prior to the attack can be seen from entries in his diary.

Tonight the 36th Division will attempt to cross the Rapido River opposite San Angelo. Everything has been done that

can be done to insure success. We might succeed, but I do not know how we can. The mission assigned us is poorly timed. The crossing is dominated by heights on both sides of the valley where German artillery observers are ready to bring down heavy artillery concentrations on our men. The river is the principal obstacle of the German main line of defense. I do not know of a single case in military history where an attempt to cross a river that is incorporated into the main line of resistance has succeeded. So, I am prepared for defeat. The mission should never have been assigned to any troops with flanks exposed. Clark sent me his best wishes; said he worried about our success. I think he is worried over the fact that he made an unwise decision when he gave us the job of crossing the river under such adverse tactical conditions. However, if we get some breaks, we may succeed.

Walker has been criticized for lacking the firm resolve that might have possibly turned defeat into victory. Like Walker, the troops believed they could not win. This was possibly their greatest handicap in the Rapido crossing.

The initial attack started at 1800 hours, but by 2000 hours the troops who had to carry bridging equipment and boats forward up to two miles, were still not at the river. The enemy artillery was accurate and deadly. At least 25 percent of the boats and footbridges were lost. Some were damaged or destroyed, others simply abandoned. Part of the trouble was the inexperience of the infantrymen carrying the equipment. Added to that was lack of forceful leadership in the small units. By the time the troops reached the river, about half of the bridging equipment was beyond use. It was a mistake to have assault troops carry their own boats; other men should have been detailed to this duty. Too many troops were concentrated in too small an area making them vulnerable to enemy fires. Boats with holes were placed in the water and went down quickly, sometimes carrying men loaded with heavy combat equipment.

Other boats sank or capsized because they were poorly handled. Some boats in good shape drifted away because they were abandoned by men seeking shelter from artillery. The prevalence of rumors and false information, the difficulty of reporting unit locations accurately on maps, an absence of control over troop movements toward the river because of casualties among leaders, ignorance of how to paddle a boat or install a footbridge, the failure of some guides to find their way correctly to the water's edge, the constant fire, and the swift Rapido current all contributed to confusion and terror.

C. Major Phases of the Battle.

Based on the absolute failure of the first attempt at the river crossing another attack was necessary for two reasons. First, perhaps a second attack could accomplish what the first had not. This was of course unlikely given the present circumstances. The second reason was that a battalion of friendly troops had been able to cross but unable to advance and was trapped on the far side with their backs to the river. A second attack was needed at least to rescue those on the far side. The important question to be answered was not if to attack but how soon could they attack. A daylight crossing was out of the question. The only thing that could possibly succeed was another night operation. The Division commander directed an attack for 2100 hours that night. COL Martin in getting his regiment ready for the next attack, addressed what he felt were the causes of the first failure. In his opinion, the failure of the engineers had been decisive. They did not lead the infantry troops through the lanes and they had furnished an inadequate supply of boats. He said the worst condition hampering the operation was the large

number of men "who complain and try to return to the rear under pretense of illness." He was referring to the large number of stragglers. Under the cover of darkness, many soldiers had simply wandered off, out of the area and away from the river and hostile fire, and back to the safety of the rear.

From the Army's point of view things were going well. The Germans were still reinforcing the area, which took troops away from the Anzio area. The attack at the Gustav line, therefore, seemed to be succeeding in its endeavor to help the Anzio forces ashore. But since the attack across the Rapido was not getting American troops into the Liri valley for a swift overland thrust to Anzio, Clark directed that every effort be made to get tanks and tank destroyers across the Rapido promptly. He directed that another attack be launched as soon as possible, meaning in daylight. This demonstrates that Clark really did not have a good grasp of the situation at the Rapido River. A night attack which had been an utter failure followed by a daylight attack was simply reinforcing failure and was itself doomed. In any case the Corps commander, Keyes, directed Walker to attack in daylight using smoke to cover his attack. Walker had already ordered his regimental commanders to attack at 2100 hours that night, but Keyes insisted that was too late. Upon being order to attack, Walker said the earliest he could comply would be at 1400 hours. A problem with boats for the crossing caused the attack time to be further delayed and 1600 hours became the designated time. COL Martin was able to start his attack at 1600 hours, but COL Wyatt, on his own, and without telling Walker, chose to delay the attack until 2100 hours that night.

Martin's attack at 1600 hours, 21 January demonstrated that not much was learned from the first attack. The same crossing sites were used and were now

zeroed in by German artillery. At least the assault troops were familiar with the ground and less likely to lose their way. Liberal use of smoke was made, but the artificial haze produced by the oil sometimes choked and suffocated the troops. Most believed this was better than being exposed to enemy fires. Under the concealment of the smoke, all three rifle companies of the lead battalion were across the river in 2 1/2 hours. Using a footbridge installed by engineers, the rest of the battalion got across. By 0200 hours the next morning, two additional companies of the next battalion had gotten across. On the far bank, the troops moved forward no more than 500 yards from the water before running into strong resistance. They dug in and awaited reinforcements. What was needed was tank support, but bridges to accommodate tanks could not be put across the river due to small arms fires at the construction sites. With no hope of heavy support and the intense fires from German artillery, the companies could not advance and had to return to their original assembly areas. Colonel Martin expressed his opinion that the attack was ill fated from the start and that it should not have been undertaken.

Wyatt's regiment attacked at 2100 hours. Using the remaining boats, two platoons were able to get across the river and eliminate small arms fire from the far side. The engineers improvised two foot bridges and two battalions of 6 rifle companies with attached weapons sections were placed on the far side of the river. No surviving Americans were found on the far side. The troops were able to advance about 1000 yards then had to dig in against strong resistance. Heavy bridging was still unable to be put in. The German fire became more intense. Communications were cut and the attack had bogged down and was deteriorating rapidly. Keys wanted to commit the reserve

regiment where Wyatt's had failed. Walker disagreed and later Keys cancelled the order. About 40 soldiers returned by swimming the river because the footbridges had been knocked out. They reported the situation as hopeless. With the troops on the far side isolated and no help forthcoming, the division ceased its attack.

In this two day action involving two of the three infantry regiments of the 36th Division, the casualties incurred totaled 1681: 143 killed, 663 wounded, and 875 missing, most of the missing were presumed captured. Increasing these figures were the losses suffered by units attached to the division for the operation: artillerymen, engineers, quartermaster, truck drivers, and others.

D. The Key Events.

The one key event in this operation is the failure of commanders above division level to see that the crossing of the Rapido river, given the circumstances, was doomed to failure. An examination of the situation using METT-T gives one ample reason to determine that this crossing was nearly impossible. The mission was to conduct a river crossing against a well fortified enemy. The enemy was well prepared and trained as well as having the advantage of the terrain. Terrain favored the enemy in that the defenses were tied into the river and they controlled the high ground from which observers could see the avenues of approach of the attacking force. The terrain for the American force on the other hand was open, untrafficable by heavy equipment, and marshy, making foot traffic to the river very difficult. The Germans had ample troops available under the conditions and did not have to commit any of their reserves to destroy the attacking American force. The

Americans had a division with which to attack. They lacked support in critical areas such as adequate boats and bridging equipment. Time available was definitely on the side of the Germans. They had been building the Gustav Line for some time and had constructed well fortified positions which the Americans had little chance of overcoming given the forces at their disposal.

E. The Outcome.

In this particular battle, a strategic victory was not gained, but certainly it was a clear tactical victory for the German forces. The 15th Panzer Division reported it had caught the 36th Division in a fire trap. Taking negligible losses, the German division captured 500 American soldiers in two days and prevented the enemy troops from crossing the Rapido river at Sant'Angelo. Strategically, however, it was another matter. Because Kesselring had sent the I Parachute Corps and two mobile divisions from the Rome area to block the British at Gorigliano, the Anzio forces came ashore with no trouble at all.

The Germans were victorious because of the poor tactics used by the American forces and the combination of poor terrain and weather conditions faced by the Americans. As has already been stated, the American forces attacked under the most inappropriate of tactical conditions. They put their strength against the enemy's strength on the defense, and with the poor weather and terrain acting as combat multipliers for the Germans, the 36th Division was defeated with relative ease by the well-prepared German forces.

The 36th Division did not accomplish its mission at the Rapido River. Although the Corps mission of tying down German forces at the Gustav Line and drawing additional forces from Rome and Anzio was successful, the crossing of

the river followed by the exploitation up the Liri valley was a complete failure.

As brought out by Blumenson, what had brought disaster to the Rapido River operation was a series of misfortunes. The near bank of the river was never completely under American control and consequently, mine clearance, reconnaissance, and the preparation of approach routes to crossing points and bridge sites were never fully completed. The weight and awkwardness of the assault boats, together with the long distance they had to be carried to the river, fatigued the assault troops before they reached the water's edge. The accuracy of the German artillery fires damaged boats, killed and wounded men, and disrupted the planned order of the operation by sending troops to the cover of foxholes or to treatment facilities. Too much artificial smoke to screen movements handicapped American field artillery observers by concealing German targets. Darkness, fog and smoke obscured familiar landmarks in the Rapido River area. Guides lost their way, and troops accidentally entered mine fields. There was a lack of cooperation between infantrymen and engineers. Firm direction was lacking resulting in mounting confusion that led to hysteria and panic.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

A. Immediate.

As indicated previously, the strategic purpose of the battle at the Rapido River was to facilitate the amphibious landing at Anzio. Clark's concept was to pin down the Germans and prevent them from transferring troops to Anzio, attract additional German forces to the Gustav Line, and break through the Gustav Line and speed up the Liri valley to linkup with the forces

securing the beachhead at Anzio. In fact, the Germans actually ended up reinforcing the Gustav Line with two divisions which had previously been stationed near Rome and could have been sent to disrupt the Anzio beachhead operations. Was the battle decisive? This question can only be answered in the general context of whether or not the overall operation was successful. The action at the Rapido did support the more comprehensive strategic Allied move to secure a landing. It must therefore be viewed in its role as a major tactical move designed to support the major strategic move. Did the battle contribute to overall mission accomplishment by doing what it was designed to do? The answer is yes, but the cost appears to outweigh the benefit. The same benefit could have probably been gained at a lesser cost. General Clark, when reflecting on the battle at the Rapido River and the attempt to deter German reserves from reinforcing at Anzio, remarked, "This was accomplished in a magnificent manner." Only in this context can the battle be viewed as decisive. The fact that the Germans actually ended up reinforcing the Gustav Line with two additional reserve divisions serves to support this. The battle was certainly more of a strategic than a tactical success; ample evidence exists to support this fact. Yet, the battle must be viewed as a tactical "tragedy." Although it held and drew in additional enemy forces, the 36th Division and supporting elements failed to break through the Gustav Line.

The results of this operation had both good and bad effects on both sides. Securing the port facilities at Anzio was a necessary and major strategic move on the part of the Allies. General Eisenhower had recognized for some time the need to secure additional port facilities to tactically and logistically support combat operations against Rome. The battle at the Rapido

River directly contributed to the success of this objective. From an Allied perspective, the immediate effect of the battle was to confine German forces in place and prevent their use at Anzio. This operation allowed securing the beachhead at Anzio and facilitated future operations for the ultimate seizure of Rome, inspite of the severely crippling effect it had on the 36th Division. No doubt the Germans were in a sense pleased with their successful defense of the Rapido River. Although the immediate effect on the Germans was probably a sense of elation, this was short lived as events would shortly begin to crush the overall German war effort. But, the tactical battle was won by the Germans at the Rapido River.

Although the Germans may have defeated the American effort to cross the Rapido, it did not really assist them in achieving any strategic objectives. They remained in firm control of the Gustav Line and they also managed to contain and isolate Allied forces at Anzio for four more months. But, realistically, the Germans were only holding on until the Allies could accumulate sufficient combat power to overwhelm the Gustav Line and eventually linkup with friendly forces at Anzio.

The outcome of the battle at the Rapido River did not provide a significant advantage to the Germans. Their successful defense of the river and tactical defeat of the 36th Division only forestalled their inevitable defeat and the subsequent penetration of the Gustav Line in May 1944 by the Allies.

The battle did pose a significant disadvantage to the Allies. The loss of life, materiel, and the adverse effect on morale was considerable. The loss of time to the Allied effort as a result of the failure to break the German

line must also be considered a detriment to the overall Allied strategic objectives of the Italian campaign. However, these significant disadvantages would not prohibit the Allies from accomplishing their ultimate goal of defeating the Axis powers.

B. Long-term.

The long-term objectives of the Allied armies were eventually accomplished and the Axis powers were ultimately defeated. The Allies, in fact the 36th Division under Walker's command, conducted a night operation which directly contributed to breaking the German defensive line and opened the Allied entry to Rome.

Although the long-term objectives of the Allies were not changed, only delayed, the same cannot be said for the Germans. The effect of the German success along the Rapido was temporary. It allowed them to hold on for a while longer, but their long-term objectives were being systematically destroyed. The victory over the 36th Division could only have been bittersweet for the German high command. As evidenced by future operations and the ultimate defeat of the German forces, the defeat of the Allied attempt to cross the Rapido River did not place them in a position from which they could not recover. Moreover, it actually had the effect of fixing those vital German combat forces in place, rendering them useless for employment elsewhere. This, of course, was part of Clarks's plan.

An unbiased examination of available documentation describing the battle at the Rapido River and its subsequent effect on Allied operations indicates that, although the action was significant in terms of the loss of personnel, materiel, and time, it cannot be credited with deciding the outcome of the

war. Nevertheless, this battle must not be viewed as insignificant to the overall Allied effort. Even though it was tragic in its consequences, the battle did prevent the German forces from using their assets elsewhere. Most observers would probably not rank the battle as much of a success from an Allied perspective and no doubt, they would be correct. However, a critical analysis of the action provides a wealth of military "lessons learned." In this respect, the battle should serve as an example of "how to" and "how not to" conduct combat operations. The battle at the Rapido River was essentially a river crossing operation, but the lessons learned from the battle action have application to all combat operations.

C. Military "Lessons Learned."

The battle at the Rapido River, and subsequent analysis of that action, has revealed a number of meaningful lessons which the serious military student can benefit from. The cost of battle requires that officers responsible for the planning and execution of future combat operations not make the same mistakes again. No doubt, many of these lessons were learned and influenced follow-on operations conducted by Generals Clark and Walker and others during the remainder of WW II. However, it is incumbent upon current and future military leaders to gain from the experience of our predecessors. In this light, the following "lessons learned" are presented, not as a criticism of the unfortunate participants of the battle at the Rapido River, but for the edification and benefit of all who may participate in future combat operations.

(1) In order to achieve the required synergism in combat operations, all elements must know and willingly participate in the planning and execution of the mission. From the very inception of the operations the commander of

the 36th Division was not a willing participant. This affected his ability to plan for the operation and to communicate his desires for its execution. Walker's poor attitude, no matter how well founded, should not have been transmitted to his subordinates because of the lack of enthusiasm it eventually created in the command. It appears that this directly contributed a lack of drive and determination to accomplish the mission which permeated through the chain of command down to the platoon and squad levels, robbing the men of their belief in victory and the will to win.

(2) Generals Clark and Keyes had noted Walker's lack of motivation for the operation. This should have keyed them to confronting Walker about any reservations he might have about the operation. They also recognized that there would be significant obstacles to overcome at the Rapido. Knowing the problems and Walker's attitude, positive leadership at this point could have resulted in enhancing the favorable outcome of the mission. Soldier's must be properly motivated in order to take every advantage to influence success in combat operations--this also includes general officers. Communication must flow upward as well as down the chain of command. A subordinate's duty is to inform his superiors of his objections prior to final decision. Failing a successful outcome of such arguments, a commander must support the plan as if it were his own. Finally, a commander must not isolate himself physically or psychologically from either his superiors or subordinates. The intent of the operation must be known and understood by all.

(3) The 36th Division was ordered to attack and conduct river crossing operations directly into the strongest German positions located along the Rapido River. Modern day tactics emphasize attacking the enemy's

weaknesses and avoiding his strengths. Instead of capitalizing on the enemy's weaknesses, the 36th Division had to drive "head on" into an enemy who had the advantage of the high ground, dug-in positions, mined approaches, and excellent fields of fire.

(4) Clearing parties should be sent forward to prepare march routes and to eliminate obstacles and mines. Along with these parties, and prior to their departure, reconnaissance operations should be conducted, even during hasty river crossing operations.

(5) Careful preparation of approach routes to river crossing points and bridge sites should be conducted whenever possible. This is done to facilitate operations, especially those conducted at night and during periods of limited visibility.

(6) It is essential that the various elements of the command cooperate so that their whole is greater than their individual parts. This is also vital to insure that the minimum requirements of the mission are achieved. The poor cooperation between the infantry and the engineer's prior to and during the river crossing attempt helped to create an atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty. Mutual cooperation and coordination prior to and during the operation would have helped to provide a degree of stability within the chaotic environment of the battle.

(7) To help prevent the isolation and alienation found on the battlefield it is necessary that leaders be seen on the battlefield. The leaders presence during the battle can help to foster the collective combat power and inertia necessary to promote the maximum amount of effort from the men. The lack of senior leadership at the most critical point of the battle,

the river crossing itself, deprived the troops of the motivation and reassurance they needed to effectively participate in the battle. The lack of aggressiveness at the squad and platoon leader level, coupled with the introduction of a large number of "green troops" into night combat, created an overwhelming need for senior leaders to provide direction. Observers and former commanders of the operation at the Rapido River indicated that given more determination and push, the crossings could have succeeded. A commander's place is with his troops at the scene of the action. Leaders must inspire their troops, motivate and sustain their confidence.

(8) From an intelligence point of view, the unsuccessful assaults underscore the importance of carefully analyzing and weighing the factors of OCOKA and enemy disposition not only at the tactical level but also at higher levels. Weaknesses, not strengths, should be attacked. Additionally, too much smoke not only conceals one's own forces, but also prevents effective observation of enemy targets. Artillery is ineffective without useful target data.

(9) When planning river crossing operations it is essential to suppress the enemy's fire power, to secure river crossing sites, to provide support with tanks if at all possible, and to provide the necessary follow-up logistical support once the crossing is conducted.

(10) With the failure of the attack on the night of the 20th the 36th Division was hastily ordered to prepare for another attack which was scheduled to take place within a few hours. This decision led to hasty planning and poor preparation by the staff and regiments. Additionally, engineer support was extremely limited due to the expenditure of bridging assets during the

previous crossing attempt. Commanders and staff must be given adequate time to plan and prepare for combat operations. Although it is recognized that sometimes this will not be possible due to the circumstances, it appears that in the case of the Rapido River battle, time was probably available and could have been more efficiently used.

All of the lessons which have been learned from the battle at the Rapido River are applicable to contemporary military students. The basics of planning for and conducting conventional military operations remain the same today as they were in times past. The tried and tested leadership techniques which could have been used at the Rapido, and which might have significantly changed events during that operation, are currently a part of Army leadership and training doctrine. The challenge is to use them.

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